

MASTER FILE

# THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY Newsletter

Issue No. 16

Spring 1991

## How We Work

Our Chairman Sir John Barraclough  
explains what the Committee does

**T**he Newsletter is of course our principal medium for letting members know how the committee is progressing with the various problems that beset us in preserving our architectural heritage and the residential quality of the Crescent. At the same time our Editor tries to include at least one article of historical interest (usually written and researched by herself) as well as others on social and technical matters.

For this issue we had planned an article on the bombing of the City (including the Royal Crescent) in 1942. But

that was before the Gulf conflict and with the feeling as we go to press that we have all had more than our fill of war and violence we decided to hold this interesting story, with its sad personal and architectural consequences, over to a later issue.

As a result there is more space for these notes. This is welcome not only because there is much to report before the Annual General Meeting on 16th April, but also because it is the last time that I shall be compiling them and is therefore by way of my valedictory report. As it is difficult for residents to





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know the extent that we are engaged with the authorities on various contentious matters, and with the benefit of more space, I am this time including a 'File Annex' with copies of some of the most recent exchanges of the very considerable body of correspondence we have to conduct.

We have continued to play our part in the saga of the tourist buses which are now recognised as an unforeseen national problem thrown up by the 1985 Deregulation Act. Several meetings have been held in the Guildhall under the Chairmanship of Councillor Mrs Helen Lanning and attended by our Member of Parliament, Councillors, officials from both Councils and representatives of residents' associations. In reflecting our concern there have been exchanges between our MP and the Secretary of State for Transport exploring ways of exercising more control within current legislation.

The upshot at our most recent meeting was broad support for an Avon proposal advanced by the Director of Highways. This amounted to a proposal that the County Council, as the Highway Authority, should exercise its power to ban all bus traffic on the contentious routes and then grant exemptions on a selective basis. This would in effect create a licensing system by which the tour operators could be limited in the numbers and frequency of the buses.

These are powers which the Traffic

Commissioners do not have. In this way I would hope that without conceding any of the ameliorations we have already won we could stand out for a major reduction of the tourist bus traffic. If that can be achieved, and having been very closely involved in the problem, it is my belief that we would have done well.

If the Highway Authority has the power to impose such a ban initially it will occur to members to ask why it cannot be sustained in toto. Here we must accept that this would not be practicable because of the appeal processes with public inquiries etc, and the over-riding need for the Highway Authority to be seen to act reasonably as between all parties.

The present state of play is that a paper on these lines went before the Avon Environment and Traffic Committee in February and was adopted subject to consultation with all concerned. Success or failure will now depend on the degree of co-operation shown in the consultation process. Should we fail through the obduracy of the bus operators then no doubt we and other Residents' Associations will want to return to the charge. There are other possible lines of approach but it would be injudicious to spell them out at this juncture.

To illustrate our involvement in this vexed matter I am including copies of correspondence with our MP and Bath City Council in the File Annex: I have





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omitted the Secretary of State for Transport's letter because without the legislative background it poses more questions than it answers, and the Avon Council paper is far too long to include.

The first part of the lawn rehabilitation programme is complete (see photo of scarifying tractor). The next phase of

weedkilling and fertilising is pro-mised for this month. In the interests of safety, as well as the treatment programme, notices will be put up warning us (and

our dogs) to keep off the grass for about 5 days after the weedkilling application. We will hope to put out a warning 'flyer' to all houses.

Our proposals for restoring the ha-ha have moved on since my last report and we now have helpful advice from the National Trust, Design Group Bath, Whitby and Bird (Engineers) and the City Conservation Architect. Currently we are trying to form a small project group from among members to be directed by our Vice-Chairman. Such matters necessarily take time in our sort of organisation but progress is encouraging and we hope to have firm

proposals to put before the AGM - including of course the order of cost and some ideas on ways and means.

The railings are unquestionably the property of the Residents and their maintenance therefore falls squarely on us. There are two aspects: remedying the slippage of the retaining wall and resetting the rails at the eastern end.

Keep Off The Grass.  
The next phase of work on the lawn, due to start soon, will use weedkillers.



and routine painting. Both look to be expensive but with the present rate of collisions at the eastern end quite a lot of the work may be done for us at insurance cost! We are including these tasks in the review to be done by our small project group initially but because the railings are in a longer timescale the two tasks will separate out in due course.

You will see from the copy letter from the Avon Director of Highways that he discounts the likelihood that weight of traffic has contributed to the slippage and that the Bath City Director of Property and Engineering takes





## The Chairman's Report

the same view. This is not all that surprising and, at this stage, we are certainly not prepared to accept that the Highway Authority has no responsibility or liability in the matter. We are taking further expert advice.

Although the restraint on local authority spending is well understood the state of our carriageway and pavement is crying out for proper care and maintenance and we accordingly returned to the charge with both Bath and Avon Councils.

We have had on-site reviews with officials from both authorities and in the File Annex you will see the responses from the Avon Director of Highways and the Bath Director of Property and Engineering Services - which although far from satisfactory nevertheless give some firm commitments to which we will endeavour to hold them.

Not being satisfied with some aspects of the Director of Property and Engineering's response the Vice-Chairman wrote about the contentious points. A copy of his letter is included in the File Annex.

The foregoing cross section of committee business will, I hope, persuade members to the view we reached in Committee that we were entering realms where we may need legal advice.

Archives show that from the earliest days of collective action by residents (e.g. installation of gas lighting) Messrs Thrings and Long of Bath acted for the

majority of the residents. We have therefore decided to resuscitate that association and have struck a sympathetic chord with Mr Sheppard a partner of the firm who seems very pleased to pick up the threads of this long-standing association as indeed we are.

My last notes touched on the sensitive issue of whether powers of traffic regulation would be better exercised by Bath or Avon. Currently there is so much political talk about the merits of double and single tier local government that this issue is unlikely to break the surface again until those major political considerations are resolved.

The amount of business and correspondence with which your Chairman and Committee find they have to deal has risen inexorably over recent years as there have been more threats and problems to combat. So much so that our Committee agenda have become far too full for us to deal with all the items properly in a single evening sitting.

We have therefore, with the Committee's approval, moved to a system of ad hoc 'executive group' meetings to discuss some of the issues in the greater detail they deserve.

The records of these meetings are then tabled at the next Committee Meeting and accepted or amended after the full committee has had a chance to question the Executive Group about their recommendations.

This does not call for any amendment



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to our constitution but it is only proper for members at large to know that we have been driven to this method of working by sheer weight of business.

Your Committee are, with justification I think, proud of our Newsletter and grateful to our Editor and Publisher for its style and content. In reviewing it recently the Executive Group recommended that we should try to put its publication on to a more regular and predictable time-table which ideally would fall in the months of February, June, and October. It will take us a while to get into that rhythm and of course we are ultimately in the hands of our ever-helpful publisher John Walker who is always extremely busy - but we will try.

We have also decided to circulate the Newsletter beyond the membership in order to widen awareness of our Society's aims and concerns and this public relations exercise will rest in the hands of our newly appointed Publicity Officer Graham Wadsworth who is well experienced in the realm of public affairs.

The curious decay of facade stonework discovered at Nos 1 and 19 houses must be a matter of concern not only to us residents and house/leaseholders but also to that much wider world concerned for Georgian architecture. There is not much that your Society can do beyond helping the Conservation Architect to get in touch and thereby facilitating the con-

sultative meeting that was planned for 14th March at the Guildhall. We will all be hoping that the problems may turn out to be less than might at first sight appear.

The Annual General Meeting is planned for Tuesday 16th April at the Bath and County Club. A formal calling notice has been circulated. Meanwhile may I remind you that next year's committee has to be elected at the meeting. Three office holders or general members are standing down.

The remaining members are ready to continue to serve but their posts may of course be contested by new candidates. The first priority is of course to find candidates to replace the retiring members, viz: Myself, Bill Wallis, Barbara Walker.

I have written to Major Crombie of the Bath Society sending our congratulations on his Society's great success in winning its appeal against Environment Secretary Nicholas Ridley's ruling in favour of the development of the Cavendish Lodge site.

To take this case first to the High Court and then to the Court of Appeal showed enormous conviction and courage in the interests of conservation which should be an inspiration and encouragement to us all. ○

File Annex begins  
on page 6.



15 February 1991

Dear Sir John,

ROYAL CRESCENT

*From: The Director of  
Property & Engineering Services  
Bath City Council*

As you will know Mr. Daw met Mr. Froggatt and myself on Wednesday and we undertook a detailed tour of inspection along the length of the Crescent. A number of specific points were raised, as well as some general matters. These are dealt with below

Carriageway We advised you that Avon County Council is hoping to make budgetary provision for a start on a phased programme of relaying the carriageway. This it is hoped will start in the next financial year (1991/92) but at this stage the programme cannot be confirmed, and you will appreciate that the labour intensive nature of the work and the need for highest standards to be achieved in this location will mean that the work will both be costly and of lengthy duration. Relatively small phases will need to be tackled in each of several years in order to achieve complete reinstatement.

Footways As Mr. Froggatt explained, ideally footway reinstatement should follow after repairs to the carriageway. Again it is hoped to make a start on the footway reinstatement in 1991/92 but this will depend very much on the funds being available and also on the relative priorities of this footway as against others. I have to say from my inspection the other day that whilst the surface leaves something to be desired it is by no means as bad as some of the footways which have been reinstated this year, and obviously due to its width and the size and type of the stones which need to be relaid, a cost benefit analysis based purely on safety matters might not give this footway a very high priority.

We also looked at more detailed matters including some of the crude work undertaken by the "Statutory Undertakers", in particular British Telecom and its predecessor, and prior to any major footway reconstruction I would certainly hope to have agreement from the respective organisations to improve the appearance of their own apparatus.

Railings Mr. Daw showed us the railing bases surrounding the Lawn the coping stones of which have in some cases become considerably dislodged. I know that the County Council's Structural Engineers have looked at this matter and I must say that I agree with them that the displacement is unlikely to be due to pressure of traffic on the carriageway. It is more likely to be due to expansion and contraction of the railings themselves over a very long period of time. You will appreciate that these railings are the responsibility of the residents and it would certainly seem appropriate that if the local authorities are to attend to the surfaces of the carriageway and the footways as part of a phased programme that the Society should encourage the Royal Crescent residents to carry out works to the railings and bases at the same time. I shall be interested to hear your views on this suggestion.

Other Matters We noted the temporary reinstatement to the carriageway carried out by Wessex Water Authority opposite Number 21. Wessex will be instructed to carry out the necessary permanent reinstatement.

The railings along the high footway at the Marlborough Buildings' end of the Crescent, which has been damaged for sometime, is the responsibility of Avon County Council. I have



raised this matter with them and will keep a personal eye on progress in carrying out the necessary repairs.

Finally, in discussion with Mr. Daw we agreed that as the Council's only Trench Inspector clearly cannot be in all places at the same time it would be very helpful if members of the Society could keep an eye on any work being carried out by Statutory Undertakers, particularly where there is concern about the quality of the workmanship. If they were to ring this office and speak to Mr. Ingersent, the Principal Engineer (ext. 2163), or in his absence to Mr. Froggatt's Secretary, this would be of assistance to us in keeping an eye on what is happening.

Yours sincerely,

R.F.S. MIMMACK  
Director of Property & Engineering Services

7 March, 1991

*From: Vice-Chairman  
Royal Crescent Society*

To: Director of Property and Engineering  
Bath City Council

Turning to the specific matters reflected in your letter:

#### Carriageway

We note Avon County Council's intention to bid for funds to start a phased programme of carriageway relaying in FY 91/2 and understand the reasons for your inability, as yet, to confirm this absolutely.

#### Footways

We were very disappointed to receive your confirmation that the assurance given in your 9 August 1989 letter ("to include the footways in a 3 year phased programme commencing next FY subject to the County Council approving such works") was not actioned. However we now note your new aspiration to make a start in FY 1991/2. At the same time we take issue with your apparent method of assessing relative priorities.

Firstly, your assessment that the footways only "leave something to be desired" does not accord with the general view of residents who use them every day. As you know some residents have been sufficiently concerned to write to their Ward Councillor about them.

Secondly, your inference that the Crescent's priority might be based on a Cost Benefit Analysis itself purely based on safety matters appears to overlook the other significant factor which must be given weight. As we discussed, this site, as the jewel in the crown of Bath's World Heritage status, demands the sustaining of special standards of maintenance and conservation. As its temporary custodians we have a mutual and collective duty to ensure these and I request that you carefully reconsider your approach to the Crescent's priority position.

Meanwhile we much welcome your other aim to achieve formal agreements with the Statutory Undertakers about their activities.

Railings

*Continued over page*



# File Annex



*Continued from page 7*

## Railings

We certainly agree your view that any major repairs to the railings and their bases must coincide with footway/carrageway works. The Society is currently engaged in some preparatory investigations of this matter and will keep you informed. We are of course aware of the County Council's Structural Engineer's views which you mention, but I am not yet in a position to say whether or not we accept them.

## Other Matters

We are glad to see the start this week of reinstatement of the carrageway opposite No 21, no doubt as a result of your action with Wessex Water Authority, for which we are grateful. Your letter does not mention - though we noted it during the tour - a smaller patch of tarmac on the carrageway opposite 16; I hope this can be tackled soon also.

We look forward to County Council action on the railings at the Marlborough Buildings end of the Crescent.

The Society will certainly encourage residents to use Mr Ingersent's good offices to alert him to events concerning the surfaces.

In our discussion after the tour you reaffirmed your 9 August 1989 assurance that the City Council as agent to the County Council would continue to organise interim patching/minor repairs to the footway in Pennant stone as necessary. This point was not re-iterated in your recent letter - since perhaps it is a 'given' - but I do re-draw your attention to items we noted on the tour which seem to fall into this category. I refer to the particularly uneven short stretch of footway from Upper Church Street to the West corner of No 1 (the part subject to much the most use) including the severely dropped kerbstone opposite the No 1 doorway, and to the various concrete slab replacements mainly towards the West End.

## Reviews

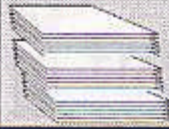
Finally, since some of the matters we are addressing will take some time to resolve, may I propose that we mutually review the position about every 6 months, the first such Review to take place in September 1991, when for example the fiscal position should be clearer.

Yours sincerely

Vice Chairman  
The Royal Crescent Society







# File Annex



December 11, 1990

Dear Sir John,

The Royal Crescent, Bath

*From Mr N William Lee,  
Avon County Engineer*

Following our telephone conversation in November, David Jenkins, the Assistant Director (Highway Maintenance and Contracts), inspected the Royal Crescent together with Officers of Bath City Council. It was agreed that the carriageway surface was in poor condition and ideally in need of a substantial major renovation.

Regrettably the funds for maintenance work of this type are very limited and there are many other competing priorities, not only in Bath but also elsewhere in the County. However, it was agreed that the carriageway had deteriorated to such an extent that work should be put in hand, and it is proposed to instigate a rolling programme whereby renovation can be undertaken over a number of years. It is anticipated that the first phase will be undertaken during 1991 and that work will then continue over some three to four years, but obviously this will depend upon the future availability of finance and therefore no firm guarantees can be given.

I understand the boundary wall and railings between the Crescent and the private park on its south side are not a Highway Authority responsibility, but rather belong to the residents. Sections of the wall and railings are in poor condition, but if they were to collapse there would be no immediate danger to pedestrians or other highway users so I can see no grounds for the Council to take any action.

I do not believe that traffic causing the Crescent has had any substantial damaging effect on the wall. The footway is wide enough for the vehicle wheel loading not to exert any significant pressure on such a low structure and I consider it more likely that natural weathering of the stone, coupled with inadequate foundations, is the cause of the problem. In addition the expansion joints in the iron fencing appear to have seized and the curved nature of the wall will exacerbate any problems resulting from thermal movement of the fencing.

I regret that the present financial climate prevents me from being more helpful but hope that this letter will go some way to meeting the aspirations of your Association.

Yours sincerely,

Director of Highways, Transport and Engineering





# File Annex



February 13, 1991

Dear Sir John,

## OPEN TOP BUSES

You may recall that at the meeting with Mr Patten on 1st February 1991, Mr N W Lee, the Avon County Council's Director of Highways, Transport and Engineering, mentioned that he is to submit a report to the County's appropriate Committee on 19th February 1991 along the lines which he outlined. I enclose a copy of that report which Mr Lee has prepared jointly with the County Solicitor.

Yours sincerely

MRS E L WILLIAMS  
SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR

February 20, 1991

Dear Sir John

## OPEN TOP BUSES

I refer to the letter by my colleague, Mrs Williams, to you of the 13th February last in which she enclosed, for your information, a report by Mr Lee, the Avon County Council's Director of Highways, Transport and Engineering, to the County's appropriate Committee on the above issue.

As you may know, that Committee met yesterday and I thought you would be interested to learn that the recommendation set out in the report was agreed. I understand that the necessary consultation exercise by the County Council will now follow.

Yours sincerely

G WALL  
PRINCIPAL ADMINISTRATOR

February 12 1991

*From: the Rt Hon Chris Patten, MP*

Dear Sir John,

I was grateful for the opportunity of meeting you again for a further discussion on open-top buses. I am sorry that we have been engaged in such a long saga and that it has taken as many months as it has to elicit the information about a possible course of action in order to deal with the exceptionally unpleasant problem which you and other residents have to face.

At the meeting I said that I would send you a copy of the letter I received from Malcolm Rifkind for your information.

I hope the discussions with the bus companies now make some progress.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



## Don't forget the AGM on April 16

**T**he seventeenth Annual General Meeting of the Royal Crescent Society will be held on Thursday 16th April 1991 at 7.15 pm at the Bath and County Club, Queens Parade by kind permission of the Club Committee. After the meeting drinks and light refreshments will be available and we hope that our Ward councillors will join us for this.

A formal Convening Notice and Agenda has been sent to all residents, accompanied by a request for nominations for the Committee and its Officers. Besides the need for all positions to be filled by election, there will be several vacancies this year and volunteers and fresh blood are always welcome. The work of the Committee covers a wide variety of topics and our discussions are lively and interesting as this Newsletter has recorded.

The existing Committee is shown, below but some will resign this year upon leaving the Crescent, or because their time of service allotted under the Constitution has expired. Details were contained in the Convening Notice.

### **Office Holders**

Chairman: Sir John Barraclough  
Vice Chairman: Mr Michael Daw  
Hon Treasurer: Mr Ian Nesbitt  
Hon Secretary: Mrs Annabel Trechmann  
Editor: Dr Monica Baly  
General Members (6):

Mrs Shirley Parker  
Mr Graham Wadsworth  
Mrs Barbara Walker  
Mr Bill Wallis  
Mr Peter Wilks (Co-opted to fill a vacancy)  
Co-opted Special Member: Dr Peter Woodward - Non-Voting Adviser from the Bath Preservation Trust. ○

## Keep an eye on the pavements

Your committee has been pursuing the unsatisfactory condition of our pavements with Council Officers over the years, and some minor improvements have resulted. A fuller report will be made at the AGM.

Meanwhile there is one aspect of the pavements' appearance on which you can help. Several utilities (BT, Wessex Water, British Gas, SWEB etc) have Statutory Authority to raise the pavements so as to install their services and equipment. In the past restoration has often been crude and careless, despite the requirements of the Public Utilities and Street Works Act of 1957. The 'policemen' of this Act, Bath City Council's Inspectors are not always aware of the action being taken. They are few in number and can't be everywhere at once.

This is where we come in. If you see workmen taking up/relaying paving stones please call Mr Ingersent, the Principal Engineer to Bath City Council, on Bath 461111 Ext 2163, or in his absence Mr Froggat's secretary. This will help them to help us by keeping an eye on what is happening. ○



## Society Notes

**Friends Of The Society.** In response to many requests, and as foreshadowed in earlier Newsletters and at last years AGM, past residents of the Royal Crescent, or any one who has an interest in the Royal Crescent and who would like to keep up-to-date with Crescent matters by receiving three Newsletters a year, are now invited to become Friends of The Society, at a payment of £5 a year. This covers the cost of the production and despatch of the Newsletter and other special notices, but does not, of course, include the right to vote at Annual General or other Meetings. The names of potential Friends should be sent to Mr Ian Nesbitt, the Treasurer, at 5 Royal Crescent. It is planned to produce a leaflet about the Society with an application form for Friend's Membership later this year, which will be made generally available.

**Christmas Dinner.** Forty four members and friends of the Society attended a Christmas dinner in the Royal Crescent Hotel on 20th November, last year. Apart from the pleasure of the social gathering and the good food in such pleasant surroundings, guests enjoyed being entertained by delightful singing from Jessica Walker and a humorous reading from Max Beerbohm superbly given by Bill Wallis. The Society is indeed fortunate in having such a high standard of professional talent in its midst. Our thanks go also to Mr Simon Coombe, the Manager of the hotel for the special arrangements he made and to his staff and especially to Mrs

Barbara Walker who organised the event.

**TV Aerials.** The last issue of the Newsletter contained an article on 'our ugly skyline'. Since then, there has been an improvement and we are glad to notice that the inappropriate tall aerial has disappeared. Aerials fixed to Georgian chimney stacks cause damage to the stonework and chimney stacks are expensive to repair.

**Congratulations.** To Society friends, and former residents, Mr and Mrs Rob Weston on the birth of their second daughter, Anna, on Good Friday.

**British Legion - Poppy Day.** £82.88 was collected in the Royal Crescent in November for the British Legion Fund. Considering the number of empty properties this is a very handsome sum.

**The Famous Royal Crescent.** (Submitted by Mr Randall of 14 Royal Crescent on leaving an article to be collected in a shop in Bath.)

*Assistant:* Your name sir?

*Mr Randall:* Randall.

*Assistant:* Address, sir?

*Mr Randall:* Flat 14, 14 Royal Crescent.

*Assistant:* Is that in Bath sir?

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